



First Case Report of Psychological Support and Hospice Care for Terminally Ill Chinese University Student

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Abstract: This case study reports the first successful case of hospice care provided to a Chinese university student in her terminal stage of life. The hospice care and psychological support enabled the student to leave in peace and reduce her family's grief.

Keywords: Chinese University Student; Hospice Care; Psychological Support.

1. Introduction

The entirety of a life cycle includes both life and death; death is the only comparable topic in equal weight as life. Talk on 'death' is usually avoided in China due to stigma in Chinese culture. Heavy emphasis is placed on 'life', but unfortunately not on 'death'. According to latest data from the National Bureau of Statistics, China, the mortality rate was 7.11 % in 2010; when the number of death reached over 9,530,000, the number of affected people in need of mourning amounted to 57,180,000, assuming each deceased person with 6 immediate relatives and friends, and 95,300,000 if 10 immediate relatives and friends is estimated for each deceased. If the three figures are cumulated, a total number of 162,010,000 per year is resulted. In other words, annually 12.1% of Chinese population is troubled by the question of life and death.

Hospice care represents the deepest concern for human life and dignity. It not only cares for the physical body, but for the emotions and soul. Through a special and comprehensive care system, it is able to reduce the patient's physical pain, decrease fear and anxiety for death, encourage the atmosphere of interpersonal warmth, and enable the patient to pass with serenity and dignity. (1)

Clinical data demonstrate that cancer has become a common and frequently-occurring disease. For patients with advanced stage cancer, they not only need to withstand the miserable physical pains caused by the disease, but the tremendous pressure of confronting death. Along the course of the disease, a variety of psychological crises and stress responses are elicited in response to emotional pressure and disease suffering, including anxiety, fear, anger, hatred, pessimism, depression, resentment, and loneliness, thus leading to much lower quality of life. (2) Therefore, hospice care needs to be implemented to address the unique psychological barrier, somatic disorder, and emo-

tional needs of advanced-stage cancer patients. Patients are thereby guided to rid physical and emotional misery, increase the quality of life, and drawing a satisfactory full stop to the final journey of life.

2. Methodology

2.1. Patient information

Huang Ting, female, biopharmaceutical technology student of Department of Pharmaceutical Engineering of the Wuhan Bioengineering Institute. During the summer of 2010, she was diagnosed with advanced liver cancer. On Sept 11, she insisted returning to school accompanied by her family. On September 15, 2010, school leadership team was informed of this situation, and immediately sent Huang Ting to Tongji Hospital for hospitalization. As the optimal time for treatment was missed, the doctor indicated that due to her physical condition, surgery was no longer an alternative, but she was to be maintained on medication for treatment.

2.2. Hospice care and psychological support method

Optimizing the surround is useful in providing a safe and comfortable living space. An optimal environment may evoke the patient to cherish the remaining of her life. Based on this, Huang Ting's ward layout resembled that of her home as much as possible. It was clean and neat, appropriately lit and surrounded with her favorite botanicals, so that the fear for hospitals and death could be diminished. Music soothing. While listening to soothing music, the patient was able to lower the tension level of sympathetic nervous system, promote emotional calmness, and reduce stress reaction for a relaxing effect. Considering Huang Ting's mood, physical condition, and favorite music types,

song such as “Sailor”, “Starry lights”, and “Plum Blossom” were selected to be played, in order to relieve stress, anxiety, irritability and other negative emotions.

Pain management. In 2000, the World Health Organization proposed “let each patient live painlessly”. The primary goal for hospice care is not to prolong the patient’s life along, but in reducing the pain level of patients of advanced cancer, enabling comfort and increasing quality of life. We instructed accompanying teachers and students to massage, assist with rinsing before and after meal, or with saline cotton wipes to reduce physical pain.

Emotional guidance and support. Hospice care needs to equip with a high degree of compassion and emotional intimacy, it also entails encouraging patients to express their inner worries and distress. Simultaneously, stable attitude, language use, facial expression and behavior can influence and improve patient’s mood and emotions; patient’s practical issues such as health, family relationship, economic and others are helped with; support and collaboration is proactively sought from close family and friends to participate in the emotional support network. We have conducted effective emotional support and counseling to Huang Ting, enabling her to spend the last days of life in warmth and supportive company.

Re-exploration of the meaning of life. Huang Ting re-explored the success and value of life through reflection and recall of life events, and understood the meaning of life and the value of her own existence. In the morning of September 17, Professor Lv Huiying conducted a 25-minute bedside counseling, and guided her reflect on campus life and interesting childhood events, and enabled her to re-experience success and meaning of life.

Fulfillment of wishes. The dying patient is often anxious for unfinished business. If the business is not fulfilled, it would be difficult to let go. Therefore trying to settle their unfinished wishes, and enabling patients to transition in peace and tranquility to another world. In the afternoon of September 16, a special graduation ceremony was held in the ward of Hepatic Diseases. Huang Ting received early graduation and was awarded graduation diploma from Wuhan Bioengineering Institute. In the morning of September 19, when Professor Lv Huiying leaned over and asked, “Tingting, do you have other wishes to tell me? I will fulfill them for you.” Huangting smiled and said, ‘No, that is it, I only wanted to see the teacher one last time.’ Her eyes closed to rest for a moment, and clenched the teacher’s hand. ‘Thanks so much to the School, School leadership and Department leadership, teachers, classmates, and junior students.’ Professor Lv immediately promised to bring her words of gratefulness to different parties. Huang Ting nodded slightly. Upon departing, Professor Lv hugged and encouraged Huang Ting, ‘Be brave for everything, all the teachers and students will give you strength, you will always be the pride of Wuhan Bioengineering Institute.’

Ting fully embraced the teacher and said, ‘I will, Professor.’

Improvement of the psychological support system. Emotional comfort and material support to the patient in critical stage will enable him (her) to bid farewell to the world in an atmosphere filled with dignity and human warmth. After the School leadership was informed of the condition of Huang Ting, a condolence monetary gift was sent to her immediately and raised donation. Nine teachers of the Department of Ideology and Politics took turns to visit and encourage her for three consecutive days. We also arranged for visits from Huang Ting’s close friends, dorm mates and ex-boyfriend. We initiated prayer activities for Huang Ting within the school, which was warmly received and responded to by all teachers and students. A lot of teachers and students forwarded their kind wishes through donations, sending prayers, and yellow ribbons. In the early morning of September 20, Huang Ting’s counselor teacher Mi Su and three students drove to San He Village of Tian Men City to visit Huang Ting who had just returned home for rest, and along sent donation of 11,843RMB. Up till then, a total of 25,873RMB raised by School had been given to Huang Ting’s parents.

Psychological counseling to patient family and classmates. ‘Death is usually more difficult to accept for patients’ family than patients themselves’, death marks the ending of patient suffering but the peak for patient family’s pain and misery. We provided psychological counseling multiple times to Huang Ting’s parents and brother. Under such conditions, Huang Ting’s family was followed-up by phone and had opportunities to release inner pains and pressure, to understand the natural course of life, and proactively face life afterwards. (3) After the decease of Huang Ting, her dorm mates experienced a series of negative psychological reactions such as low mood, fear, and anxiety. In response to this, we provided mourning treatment to each dorm mate, and help to release negative emotions.

3. Result

At 2am of September 21, 2010, after struggling with the terminal disease for close to half a year, Huang Ting left for another world with love and warmth from teachers and students. Upon reflecting the series of hospice care performed, the Psychological Health Education and Counseling Center of the Wuhan Bioengineering Institute realized the expected goals, in utilizing techniques of hospice care, effective intervention, emotional support and counseling was performed for Huang Ting and her family.

For Huang Ting, to be able to feel the care and love from family, teachers and classmates as well as society, to be able to reduce psychological and physiological pain, and death be no longer regarded as horrid, life was respected and her feelings understood. Huang Ting was able to enjoy her remaining days regret-free and pain-free.

Huang Ting's family also expressed tremendous gratitude to Professor Lu and Institute leadership. Their words of gratitude included that if it were not for the end-stage hospice care provided to their daughter, Huang Ting would not have enjoyed the terminal stage of her life, and that she would not left the world in such peace and fulfillment.

4. Conclusion

Life to death is a natural progress. Broadly speaking, if death is a destiny nobody can escape from, either naturally or from disease or disaster, everyone will have to face fear before dying. Hence, hospice care should be regarded from a broad and educational perspective. Hospice care does not only entail medical care to the dying patient, but to provide education on death to all people involved (they will all essentially experience death in future), so that they will all be emotionally and psychologically prepared to 'accept' future potential deaths, and regard death as a resource and motivation mechanism for future life and development planning. The broadness and depth of life will be expanded through re-inspecting the significance of life integrity.

"If you do not know death, how do you know life?" Even though education on death appears to be a discussion on death, but it is a focus on life. Life is reflected upon and explored through talking about death, people are encouraged to face death for life's meaning and significance. Life will thus be cherished and respected; a person's own death

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and those of his surroundings will then be regarded more thoroughly and respectfully.

This case represents the first successful report of hospice care and psychological support provided to Chinese university student in his/her terminal stage of life. It is humbly hoped that through unveiling the support system and process to student patient Huang Ting, deeper insight will be provided to the care of terminally ill university student patients, and that more patients in this population will benefit from adequate and effective psychological support and hospice care.

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